Parvez, others summoned in kickbacks case

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: An accountability court on Thursday summoned former chief minister Parvez Elahi and other suspects on Jan 15 for fresh indictment in a reference related to alleged kickbacks in Gujrat development projects.

Previously, the court had framed charges on Mr Elahi on Jan 7, 2025.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) recently filed a supplementary reference against two new suspects – Suleman Iqbal and Muzaffar Iqbal – in the reference.

Therefore, the court summoned Mr Elahi and all other suspects for fresh indictment on Jan 15.

The NAB reference alleged that Muhammad Khan Bhatti, being principal secretary to then chief minister Parvez Elahi, manoeuvered the award of contracts in favour of blue-eyed contractors in connivance with other suspects, including officials of government departments.

It said the suspects released full payment to the contractors even before the commencement of construction work only to receive kickbacks.

The bureau alleged that money from the corruption committed by Bhatti had been transferred into the bank accounts of Elahi and his son Moonis Elahi.

Biometric verification mandatory in courts

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) is going to make biometric verification mandatory for all parties, witnesses and sureties involved in cases filed in the court and the district judiciary of Punjab.

The verification system would be linked to Nadra's database, ensuring accurate and reliable verification.

The biometric verification facility would also be available at Nadra e-Sahulat centres, making it convenient for citizens to access the service, said a statement.

LHC Chief Justice Aalia Neelum believes that the implementation of the biometric verification system will curb fake litigation, protect parties from impersonation and prevent the use of fake witnesses and sureties.

The system will be rolled out in the LHC's principal seat and its benches in Multan, Bahawalpur, and Rawalpindi, as well as in all district judiciary courts across the province.

"The initiative is a significant step towards modernising the judiciary and ensuring the integrity of judicial processes. The biometric verification system will enhance the credibility of the judiciary and provide a secure and efficient way of conducting judicial proceedings, the statement concludes.

Two offloaded from Kenya-bound flight

By Our Correspondent

GUJRAT: The immigration authorities of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Thursday offloaded two passengers who attempted to illegally move to Europe through visit visas of an African country at the Sialkot International Airport.

An FIA official said that Muhammad Nafees and Nabeel Idrees, both residents of Gujranwala, were about to leave for Kenya on visit visas through flight number FZ 316.

During the scrutiny of documents and immigration clearance, the credentials of both the passengers were found suspicious. Upon further investigation about their travel plans, both the passengers revealed that they had paid human trafficker Muhammad Qasim Rs 4 million each for travel to Libya via Kenya and then to Italy by boat.

They were handed over to anti-human trafficking cell AHTC Gujranwala for further necessary action.

LAHORE: A vendor sells electric heaters outside Delhi Gate as the demand for heating appliances surges due to chilly weather. — White Star

Every district to have stroke centre

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has said stroke centres will be established across the province, marking a significant advancement in emergency healthcare infrastructure to ensure timely treatment of such patients in every district.

Presiding over a meeting to review the Stroke Management Programme here on Thursday, the chief minister said under a phased implementation plan, stroke centres would be established in all district headquarters hospitals in Punjab, beginning with 30 facilities in the first phase, followed by 15 in the second and the remaining 24 in the final phase.

"The initiative aims to ensure that stroke patients receive critical treatment within the crucial four-hour 'golden window' during which timely intervention can prevent permanent disability. Every patient should have access to emergency medical facilities at the nearest hospital, eliminating the need for patients to travel to distant cities during medical emergencies," she said and added each district would be equipped with qualified neurologists and pediatric neurologists to manage stroke cases effectively.

The CM directed that CT scan machines in all government hospitals across Punjab be made fully functional to support rapid diagnosis and treatment protocols.

The meeting was told that physicians would receive specialised training in stroke management, including administration of Tissue Plasminogen Activator (TPA) and Tenecteplase (TNK) injections. The CM set a target of mid-February for completing injection procurement and treatment training programmes. Approval was granted for the purchase of TPA injections, while a consensus was reached on providing the advanced TNK injection for stroke treatment.

To bridge immediate healthcare gaps, the Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC) will temporarily provide stroke management services until district-level facilities become operational.

The stroke management training programme will ensure that physicians are properly trained in emergency protocols and can administer life-saving treatments promptly.

The meeting was informed that stroke remained a main cause of death and disability in Pakistan, with thousands of cases reported annually. "The timely administration of clot-busting medications within the golden window can dramatically improve patient outcomes and reduce the burden of long-term disabilities on families and the healthcare system."

Honorarium Card for Prayer Leaders

The chief minister on Thursday launched Punjab's first honorarium card for prayer leaders that will provide monthly financial support to over 66,000 registered Imams across the province.

Ms Nawaz distributed honorarium cards among the prayer leaders from various districts of Punjab. "The project, which will cost Rs20 billion annually, introduces a transparent digital payment mechanism, ensuring direct transfers to the beneficiaries," she said.

Under the scheme, registered Imams will receive a monthly honorarium of Rs25,000 through the CM Honorarium Card. The recipients can withdraw funds directly from ATMs, eliminating intermediaries and ensuring complete transparency in disbursements. Regular payments through the card system will commence from February.

Hafiz Naeem warns of simmering public anger

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Jamaat-i-Islami Emir Hafiz Naeemur Rehman has warned that if the ruling elite continue to sustain the oppressive system and deny people their democratic right, public anger will erupt with consequences the powerful will be unable to contain.

Talking to the media after addressing the concluding ceremony of Bukhari Sharif at Jamia Markaz Uloom-e-Islamia on Thursday, Rehman demanded the establishment of a genuinely empowered local government system and the removal of all restrictions on democratic freedoms.

He said the country's youth were being pushed into despair as access to education and employment continued to shrink, while electricity, gas and fuel prices were rising relentlessly. He criticised what he termed a decaying judicial system, further weakened by amendments that had tightened the elite's control, and said the economy remained trapped in an interest-based framework that benefitted only a few.

Referring to the newly-introduced local government law in Punjab, he called it a black law imposed at a time when people were already struggling to survive. He said JI considered resistance against this unjust and exploitative system a national and moral obligation.

Mr Rehman cautioned rulers to read the situation carefully and address people's grievances, warning that once public frustration turns into open revolt, force and weapons would not be able to suppress it. "When lawful avenues are blocked, people are pushed towards unlawful means," he said, urging authorities to respect public opinion and restore people's rightful voice in governance.

He also criticised Pakistan's ruling circles for their eagerness to seek the favour of US President Donald Trump, despite his role in advancing a new colonial order, providing blanket protection to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu despite international court rulings, and actions against Venezuela's leadership. He said Pakistan's rulers must represent the aspirations of their own people instead of seeking foreign approval.

The JI chief, earlier, urged religious scholars and students to rise above sectarian differences and unite the Ummah on common principles. He emphasised that spreading knowledge, strengthening outreach to ordinary people and accelerating the struggle for the establishment of *Deen* were among the most noble traditions of Islam.

Reaffirming JI's commitment to peaceful political resistance, Mr Rehman cited the example of JI Bangladesh, saying that despite severe repression under Sheikh Hasina's rule, steadfast and patient struggle ultimately forced the dictator to flee. He also referred to the resistance of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood as examples of resilience against oppression.

"Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan stands firmly with the people and will continue to raise its voice for their rights," he said, adding that the struggle for the supremacy of a just and rightful system would be intensified.

Two siblings burnt alive in coal stove fire

By Our Correspondent

SAHIWAL: Two minor children were burnt alive when a coal stove accidentally ignited a fire in Bashir Colony on Thursday today.

Eyewitnesses said it was their sister who raised an alarm after noticing the fire, alerting neighbours who immediately called Rescue 1122. By the time help arrived, the blaze had already consumed the room, leaving both children fatally injured and destroying household items.

Reports said children's father, Muhammad Yasin, a labourer, and their mother, who works as a domestic help, had left for work early in the morning. To keep their children warm amid the severe cold, they had left a coal stove burning inside the room. The children, Abdullah (6) and Abdur Rehman (8), were trapped as one of the coals fell outside stove and some cloth caught fire. The fire spread rapidly, engulfing clothes, quilts, and wooden furniture. Both sustained critical burns and later succumbed to their injuries. Their sister, Samiya (7), managed to move away from the room and alerted neighbours and passersby.

Rescue 1122 teams reached the spot, extinguished the fire and recovered the bodies. The Ghalla Mandi police handed over the remains to the family after post-mortem examination at the Sahiwal teaching hospital. Police have initiated an investigation into the incident.

Deputy Commissioner retired Capt Samiullah Farooq visited the spot and expressed condolences to the bereaved family.

ENCOUNTER: A suspected outlaw was killed while his two accomplices managed to escape during an encounter with the Crime Control Department (CCD) near Adda Kator Wala, Chak No. 84/5-L, late on Wednesday night.

According to CCD officials, the deceased was identified as Ali Hayat Lahori, a resident of Mughalpura, Lahore.

He was described as a hardened criminal, absconder, and wanted in more than 35 criminal cases registered with various police stations.

Reports said the CCD police received information that three dacoits were looting citizens by blocking the road near Adda Kator.

A police team, led by Inspector Muhammad Asad Raza, rushed to the spot. Upon seeing the police van, the suspects opened fire, triggering a cross-fire that continued for nearly 30 minutes. After the exchange of fire, police recovered the body of Ali Hayat, while his two accomplices fled on a motorcycle.

Police claimed that Ali was fatally shot in firing by his own accomplices during the encounter. A 30-bore pistol was recovered from the site. Later, CCD registered a case under Sections 302, 324, 353, 393, 186, 34 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and Section 13A(2) of the Arms Ordinance Act against the two unidentified accomplices, on the complaint of Inspector Asad Raza.

Railways crew directed to adhere to safety protocol

A driver claims trains being chugged at 30 to 40km per hour speed in fog pockets

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: As the foggy conditions continue to disrupt trains schedule for the last many days, the Pakistan Railways divisional formations have advised the drivers, assistant drivers and those responsible for safe train operation to remain vigilant and adopt all safety-related standard operating procedures to avert any accident.

On the other hand, the passengers at all major stations, especially on the main line continue to suffer due to hours-long delay in the arrival and departure of various trains and cold weather.

"The officials responsible for safe train operations across the country have been put on high alert with a a direction to ensure safety of passengers and goods in all passengers and goods/freight trains by averting any untoward event in the ongoing wave of cold weather amid massive fog causing reduction in visibility," an official source explained while talking to Dawn on Thursday.

"The officials directed in this regard include divisional and assistant executive engineers concerned, station masters and their assistants, points-men, train examiners, drivers and their assistants, break guards, officials dealing with signaling system and police constables meant for patrolling in the trains," the staffer requesting anonymity added.

He said the officials (especially drivers/assistant drivers) have been asked to take extraordinary precautionary measures while passing through the densely fog-covered areas on way to their destinations.

Talking to this reporter, a train driver said since the entire PR operation has been put on high alert due to foggy weather, the drivers are operating trains at the speed ranging between 30 and 40km per hour while passing through such areas.

"The speed depends upon visibility. If it is low, we have no option but to decrease the speed. And if it is clear, we accelerate the train," he added.

He said though they remain in touch with the operation staff deputed at stations through phone system, they have no contact with those appointed at the manned level crossings. "But the unmanned level crossings are very dangerous these days, as anyone suddenly comes on the track, " he warned, requesting the officers concerned to install heavy fog lights on the locomotives for visibility during ongoing foggy weather.

"The PR has also suffered a horrible accident wherein the train collided with a police van while passing through an unmanned level crossing near Sialkot," he said.

Meanwhile, the weather continues to disrupt the trains schedule across the railway network in the country for the last many days. On Thursday, 42-down Karakoram express departed late from Lahore to Karachi. Karachi express (15-down) also departed late for Karachi from Lahore, followed by various other trains that departed late for various destinations after arriving late due to fog.

CHINIOT: Thick fog reduces visibility in the morning. — APP